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MR. RIPLEY'S

FAREWELL DISCOURSE.

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A

FAREWELL DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED TO

THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

IN

* 7551.24

PURCHASE STREET,

MARCH 28, 1841.

By GEORGE RIPLEY.

[PRINTED BY REQUEST, FOR THE USE OF THE CHURCH, NOT PUBLISHED.]

BOSTON.

1841.

and the cheering sympathy which has been at my side in all seasons of sorrow or of joy. My entrance to the Christian ministry was connected with the origin of this religious society ; neither you nor myself has known any other pastoral relation ; our interests and our hopes have hitherto been identified ; and though many of those who were the first to greet my coming, are not here to-day to receive my farewell, it is this congregation, to which my youthful strength was devoted, with which I have gathered the first fruits of the experience of life, and whose welfare can never cease to be among the objects that are nearest my heart.

It is natural to suppose, that a separation of this kind cannot take place without many serious, and, to a certain degree, painful emotions. We have been associated on the most intimate terms ; there has been little of the reserve and formality which often characterize the social intercourse of minister and people ; my presence has never put a stop to youthful gayety ; and you have been no less sure of my sympathy, when sadness has come over your homes, because it was never withheld in your hours of relaxation, nor supposed that because I loved to rejoice with those who did rejoice, that I was ever the less ready to weep with those who wept. I have always been desirous of meeting you not only as your religious teacher, but as your personal friend ; I have wished to know of your welfare and the welfare of your families ; and have never thought that there

could be a true and wholesome relation between us on Sundays, while strangers to each other through the week. In any instances, where this familiar acquaintance has not been maintained, it has surely been through no want of disposition for it on my part; the door of my house and of my heart has never been shut to those who sought it; and it is one of the many pleasant recollections that I shall bear with me from this place, that my situation as your minister has never debarred me from your friendship as a man.

It is true, indeed, that not a few even of the small number by whom this Society was commenced have passed away. The brief space of time we have been together is no inconsiderable portion of human life; and the experience which we have gained from it is a forcible illustration of the rapidity of earthly changes and the uncertainty of mortal hopes. We have the satisfaction at this hour, to know that some in whose affections this church held a prominent place, who were chiefly instrumental in its establishment, and most warmly concerned for its success, have derived from its influences those blessings which it was designed to impart, have here worshipped for many years in serenity and peace, have here enjoyed hours of holy communion with the Father of their spirits, have here gained strength for the conflicts of life, and courage for the approach of death; and, in the exercise of the faith, which was kindled and kept alive at this altar of devotion, have met the last messenger, without fear, and departed, in the beauty of

holiness, from the warfare with sin and the world, to the rest that remaineth for the people of God.

The remembrance of those loved and honored members of this Christian family, who, when with us, were our strength and ornament, and who, when taken from us, have left the choicest influences still, must come before our minds on the present occasion. We love to look back on the time when they were in the midst of us. It is good to renew the memory of their excellence, and almost to believe that they can sympathize in the transactions of this day. We can never forget the spot which to them was so dear; we must ever love the altar from which the incense of their piety ascended to heaven; we can never regard that as a vain service, by which they were cheered in life and trained for immortality. Their example teaches us the power of simple goodness; assures us, that a soul true to itself, will never fail of the presence of God; and that a righteous life is an unfailing preparation for death.

We have already given the last farewell to those cherished friends; their parting words of benediction are treasures laid up in the heart; we have followed them to the confines of eternity, and wait for the disclosures which our own departure may present.

I speak to-day to their children, their survivors, their friends. The connexion which in their case has been sundered by death, in the present case is dissolved by our own voluntary act. You have released me from services, which I have felt that I

could no longer perform. You have consented that I should retire from a station which I have been long convinced could be more effectually filled by another than myself. We put an end to the relation which we have sustained, not through disappointed hopes, or changed affections; but with mutual esteem and love, for the sake of mutual benefit.

I do not feel, therefore, that this occasion authorizes the indulgence of any painful emotions, other than those which an interruption of wonted usage is adapted to produce. I would not have this parting hour a season of sadness and gloom; I would bring around it the cheerful associations, with which we may regard it; and dissolve the relation by which we have been bound, in the same spirit of kindness and of hope with which it has been sustained.

For, in truth, our connexion with each other, my friends, is by no means to be dissolved. We do not separate, as did Paul, and his Ephesian friends, who sorrowed most of all, "that they should see his face no more." I trust that we shall still not be thrown widely apart, that we shall see each other with but little less frequency than heretofore; that we shall sustain many mutual relations of a friendly and interesting character, and that we shall often meet with neighborly regard as men, though as minister and people we shall meet no more.

The connexion of a pastor and a church is certainly one of no ordinary importance. It brings men together in peculiar and sacred relations. Where it

truly exists, where one speaks a living word to the soul of another, it is the most holy and the most delightful that can be found between man and man. But because this relation is dissolved, it is no reason why many others should not be continued. As you well know, I attach but little importance to the mere office, irrespective of the manner in which it is filled; no person holds the paraphernalia of a clergyman in less esteem than myself; I look upon the arrogant claims which the profession sometimes puts forth, with perhaps a little of disgust, but with more of pity; and have always been disposed to bear in mind, what is often lost sight of, that one cannot be a minister until after he is a man.

I cannot, therefore, persuade myself, that by leaving you as I do, I am to lose you altogether; or that new relations, perhaps not less interesting to both of us, may not take the place of those which have been interrupted. If we can meet each other as sincere and virtuous men, striving together for the common good, devoted to pure and worthy objects, endeavoring to realize the spirit of Christ, the principles of justice and love, in our households and in society, there will still be a strong bond of union between us, we shall still honor and help each other, though the tie with which we have hitherto been united, is severed forever. The church is not the only place where sincere men meet in spiritual communion; but wherever even two or three are gathered together in the spirit of Christ, there is the promise of the divine

presence as sure, and the offering of worship as acceptable, as in the pillared cathedral, or before the consecrated altar.

And it is time, my friends, and more than time, that we should learn to think less highly of the official relations which men sustain to each other, and make a juster estimate of the natural relations which grow out of our common humanity. It is a far greater thing to be a righteous man than to exercise the functions of a clergyman. The relations which you sustain to your fellow-citizens, to your families, to society, to the holy cause of truth, freedom, and justice, involve duties no less important, nor less arduous, no less responsible, than those of him who fills the sacred desk. You cannot insist too strongly on purity, fidelity, disinterestedness, and a sincere devotion to duty, on the man who acts as your religious teacher. But, I beseech you to remember, that you are equally bound, in the sight of God, if not of man, to the exercise of the same virtues, whether your sphere be in the halls of legislation, the counting-room, or the mechanic's shop. We need to cleanse our relations with each other, with our fellow men every where, in the discharge of business, in our daily industry, in our buying and selling, in our housekeeping and our storekeeping ; we have need that they be conformed to the law of conscience and the law of Christ ; and if, my friends, we meet in no other relations than these, it will be no small thing to do so in the endeavor, that all our ways be as pure as we

deem the aisles of the church, that all our transactions may be as holy as we are wont to regard those in which we have hitherto been chiefly concerned.

Nor do I believe that the pastoral relation, if there are any cases, in which it has sincerely existed between you and me, can be entirely suspended by this separation. It is not meeting you Sunday after Sunday in the church, that makes one your pastor. It is not visiting you in your houses, baptizing your children, and burying your dead, that establishes this relation. You cannot come under the pastoral care by the purchase of a pew, by attendance on public worship, nor by zeal for the rites and observances of the church. How deeply have I felt, that many have done all this, whom I could not fail to respect and love as men, but to whom I have been in no degree a pastor; who have had no sympathy with my most earnest convictions; whose souls have never thrilled under a word of mine spoken in this place; and who have been as much strangers to the ideas which I have set forth from the fulness of my heart, as if we had spoken a different language. And so it must be ever. He only can be a pastor to my soul, who, like Jesus to the woman of Samaria, can tell me all things that ever I did; who knows the secret emotions of my heart; who enters so truly into my condition as to enable me better to understand myself; and whose words find a ready advocate and interpreter in my own breast. This relation, therefore, can rarely exist in all its strength and

purity. If it has not existed here, in a manner to meet the highest wishes, I ascribe it to no fault in you or me, but to the unavoidable limitations of human nature.

But if any of you have received here a word of truth, in the spirit in which it has been spoken ; if a true spiritual relation has grown up between your soul and mine ; if you have felt your better nature kindled and inspired, your views of life and duty enlarged, your sense of the obligations of human beings aroused, or your devotion to God and your sympathy with man excited to fresh action, by the services of this house, be assured, that a connexion thus established cannot easily be dissolved. We may but seldom see the faces of each other ; our spheres of action may be widely distant ; but we are forever bound to one another in the immortal fellowship of truth ; we belong to the same household of faith, we drink of the same spiritual rock ; and we are brothers, united by the ties of a common loyalty and faith, and no earthly change can separate our souls. I would fain hope that such a relation may have been built up, during the many years that we have travelled in the same path. I would fain believe that the testimony of truth, as here set forth, has not been without an answering testimony in your hearts ; that I meet to-day those whose sorrows have been soothed by the voice of sympathy, whose souls have been elevated by new convictions of truth, and who feel that they have been made better by the ministrations

of this house. To such I will not say farewell; if once united, we shall not soon be separated, but wherever the Divine Providence may appoint our lot, let us again resolve with each other, to spare no endeavor for the realization of the great principles of truth and justice and humanity, which should be dearer to us than life.

It is a cheering circumstance, moreover, that to whatever extent our present connexion may be dissolved, that we part on terms of friendship and mutual respect and peace. It is always difficult to break up established relations. The ties of habit are often stronger than those of reason. We cling to usages, which our judgment disapproves. The fear of change not seldom is the cause of present evils. We are loath to be disturbed in relations which custom has made pleasant, and perhaps necessary. Hence the dissolution of the pastoral relation is often attended with difficulty. It is rarely accomplished without a certain degree of excitement, perhaps of discontent and ill-will. It involves a trial of character, in which reasonable men sometimes fail. We may congratulate ourselves that such has not been the course of proceeding in the present instance. I do not leave this place by reason of any coldness or unkindness on your part. I have no cause of complaint with your treatment of me from the beginning to this day. We have had unworthy and unreasonable men with us, but they have usually not found themselves at home in our company. I have been

as happy in my connexion with you, as I could be with any religious society in the circle of my acquaintance, and what I have often said before, I now repeat, that there is no pastoral charge which I would accept in preference to that which I have sustained. I have rejoiced in the affection which you have shown me ; I have been cheered by your love and that of your children ; and surely my very imperfect attempts to serve you have been received with all the candor of which they have stood in such urgent need. I will shake off no dust from my feet as a testimony against this house ; but rather express the language of my heart, — If I forget thee, thou beloved temple of our God, let my right hand forget its cunning, and let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth.

Why then, it may be asked, is a connection to be dissolved, where on either side there is nought but respect and good will ?

I answer, in the first place, I have remained here much longer than I expected when I assumed this pastoral charge. I came here, as you well know, with the faintest prospects of success. I received no encouragement from those who invited me, that a prosperous society could be built up in this place. On the contrary, they were honest and explicit. They assured me that there would be great difficulties in my path ; that there were formidable obstacles to the establishment of a church in this section of the city ; but they desired to give a fair trial to the

experiment which they had commenced. With something too much of youthful zeal and self-confidence, no doubt, I assumed the trust; certainly not without misgivings; but as certainly, with a firm resolve to devote myself to my task, and accomplish it to the best of my strength. Here then I came, scarce emerged from the inexperience of boyhood, with a degree of ignorance and want of preparation which it is fearful to look back upon, knowing little except what books and college professors can teach, and bringing few qualifications for my work but a readiness to learn, and a determination to keep my eyes open, and see for myself. I had been here but a short time, when I found that my course was to be one of greater conflict than I had anticipated, that few materials for a strong and permanent society could be gathered by my influence; and from year to year I have felt like a pilgrim with his staff in his hand, and the voice sounding in my ear, Arise and depart, for this is not your rest. I foresaw almost from the beginning, that though it might be in my heart to live and die with you, there was but a faint prospect that such would be the case. Still there has seemed no reason, at one time more than another, why I should ask to be excused; no intimations were given me that a change was desirable; and even when I have received proposals from other quarters, which tempted me by pleasant spheres of honorable usefulness, I could not persuade myself to abandon the humble fortunes of this society; it con-

tained many of the best friends I had on earth ; and here, said I, as long as I give satisfaction, will I be satisfied myself.

The first breath that reached my ear, that a change in the ministry might be more useful to the society, decided my mind. From that moment, I perceived that the strongest motive which retained me here was set aside ; I knew that I had done all that I could ; I was sure that no further exertions on the present basis could be of much avail ; and I felt strongly desirous to give place to another who might continue the experiment with more hope than myself.

There was but one course, which my judgment and conscience could approve, that offered any good prospect of success. That course I pointed out in my communication of October last ; nor was I disappointed in the reception which it met with or the result to which it has led.

I might enlarge on this point ; I might speak at length on the character and purposes of a true church of Christ ; and the defects under which we labor with our present organization ; but this would be superfluous ; you know my convictions in regard to this, and I have already said more than I intended.

In view of these circumstances, I have long been persuaded that under the present arrangements, the society could not be advanced to a greater degree of prosperity than it has hitherto enjoyed. We must either open our doors to the most unlimited freedom

of discussion, renounce all unmanly terror at the progress of thought, avow our intention in all things to come up to the spirit of Christ, without fear of disturbing ancient fixtures, and thus draw around us the young and earnest spirits, who are seeking better things; or else go on in the same unsatisfactory course as heretofore. But this, all experience has taught us, would be without avail. The local obstacles to the establishment of a flourishing church on this spot are so numerous, that it was plain, the usual routine of clerical duty must remain fruitless. It is true we have a spacious and pleasant house; we are more free from pecuniary embarassments than many of the religious societies in this city; our congregations are usually not smaller than those which assemble in our associated churches; and the number of families under my pastoral care, has long been greater than I could serve to my own satisfaction. Still we have always been somewhat below the standard that is usually aimed at; not all our pews have been occupied, and our numbers have been often thinned by the removal or the decease of faithful friends. We have never been able to point out any brilliant results; we have had no pageants, no gala days, no extraneous attractions to draw crowds; nothing has ever been done for effect, and the consequence is, the evidences of success are to be looked for in the hearts of obscure men and women, who are scarce known to each other, rather than in the market price of our property. In such a state

of things, it is perfectly natural, that a degree of discouragement should take place in the minds of both minister and people. Many would be led to look into the cause of our backward condition; and though no criminal neglect of duty should be ascribed to the incumbent of the pulpit, it was scarcely to be avoided that a full share of the embarrassment should with the best intentions, be placed to his responsibility. It might very innocently be supposed that if the pastor were more inclined to conform to ancient usage; if he were more willing to work in the yoke of popular customs, to take his views of truth from his elders, rather than from his own mind; if he would acquiesce more readily in prevalent errors and abuses; if he would take the social standard of Boston at this moment, as the everlasting standard of right; if he would consider all ideas except those of domestic manufacture, as contraband; if he would be content to remain fast anchored to the fixtures of the crudest youth, and preach forever as he preached ten years ago; if he would close his eyes upon the broad light which is now rising upon the nations, and join the popular cry against reform and progress; if he could be induced to humor the prejudices of men, and exert a little more of clerical authority; if his sympathies were more with those who are conspicuous in the rank of wealth and fashion, and he would cease to pour contempt on merely outside distinctions; if his strongest friendships were not with the lowly and

wretched, and his most earnest endeavors put forth in their behalf; in short, if it were his aim to be more of a priest and less of a man, it is possible that our affairs might wear a different aspect. It is possible that the church might be completely filled by one who had the burden of no peculiar heresies, and who was more willing to fall in the ways of the world, than to conquer and live above it.

It was natural, I say, that such suggestions should be made even by those of whose friendship and respect, I had no reason to doubt. I honor the frankness, with which at any time, I have been made acquainted with them, but they have never acted strongly on my mind, except in one direction; they have all tended to convince me, that I had too little faith in many popular prevalent ideas, to satisfy a congregation, that was not as far from them as myself. One course only remained for me,—to give a full disclosure of all my heresies; to confess that I was a peace man, a temperance man, an abolitionist, a transcendentalist, a friend of radical reform in our social institutions; and if there be any other name that is contrary to sound doctrine, as now expounded by the masters in our Israel, to consent to bear whatever stigma might be attached to it. I was unwilling to sustain a false position for a moment. As soon as I knew that any suspicion was attached to what forms the very central spring of my life, and which I regard as the essence of reason and of Christianity, I was bound to declare the

whole ; and if through no fault of mine, I had been misunderstood before, I should be misunderstood no longer.

The only grounds on which I could continue the pastoral care, not being accepted by the congregation, as declared to me by the committee with whom I had an interview for that purpose, I had no alternative but to resign my office. This has been done, and to-day my resignation is carried into effect.

We part in peace. An honest difference of opinion need alienate no kind feelings. I have felt bound to make the statements which I have now presented ; but you will do me the justice to believe, that it is with no emotion but that of perfect kindness to every man, woman, and child in this society. If I have enemies here, I know them not ; I never will know them ; I will believe no man my enemy, however much he may differ from me, who cannot call forth from me a feeling of ill will. I hope to meet you often, here and elsewhere, in a friendly manner ; I trust I shall many times preach in this pulpit again ; and in whatever way I can aid you, let me still be your servant.

I cannot but repeat my thanks for all your kindnesses. You have borne candidly the freest expression of unpopular ideas ; you have seen something to approve in the man, whatever you might think of the heretic ; and to me and mine you have been faithful and just ; from my heart I thank you for it, and may God bless you forever. I wish you pros-

perity as a society. No man can rejoice more than I shall to see my place more effectually filled than it has been by myself. I pray God that you may speedily be blessed with a pastor, more able, more zealous, more discreet, more affectionate, more devoted to you and yours than I have ever been.

I wish you all manner of happiness as individuals. I see here old familiar faces that it has always been a blessing to look on. If it had pleased God, I would have remained with them till death did us part. May their declining years be full of peace and of immortal hope. May their dying bed be cheered by the voice of sincere sympathy. May they remember their pastor who was truly attached to them; and when they pray for themselves let them pray for him, who now wishes the blessing of God on their souls.

I leave the youthful portion of this society, with as sincere regret, as I part with their parents. I shall always watch their progress with affectionate interest. I beseech the Divine Providence that they may grow up free from worldly ambition, from the frivolity of fashionable life, from every passion that wars against the soul.

Brethren, I have much more to say. But it is in vain. At such times as these, words are poor. We now understand each other well. We part with mutual good wishes and good hope. May the Lord bless you forever. Brethren and friends, I bid you farewell.

APPENDIX.

Mr. Ripley's Letter to the Society, and their Reply, together with Resolutions passed by the Society, January 31, 1841.

BOSTON, Jan. 1, 1841.

To the Proprietors of the Congregational Church in Purchase street.

MY RESPECTED FRIENDS,

In a communication presented to the society on the first of October last, I stated the conditions on which alone, in my opinion, our connection as people and pastor could be continued with mutual pleasure and advantage. While the views and sentiments expressed in that communication have been received in a friendly manner by those to whom it was addressed, I have seen no evidence that they accord with the convictions of a sufficient portion of the society, to warrant the hope of a successful exercise of my ministry under the present relations. I ask leave, therefore, respectfully to resign my office as Pastor of the Purchase Street church, and request to be discharged from the performance of its duties after the expiration of the present quarter.

With grateful remembrance of the kindness and candor which have marked your intercourse with me, and sincere wishes for your future prosperity,

I am, my friends,

Your respectful and affectionate servant,

GEORGE RIPLEY.

At a meeting of the Society held January 24, 1841, it was

Voted, To accept the resignation, and discharge the Rev. George Ripley, from the performance of any further duties after the expiration of the present quarter.

Voted, That James B. Richardson, George G. Smith, and Josiah M. Jones be a committee to reply to the communication of the Rev. George Ripley.

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,
Purchase street, January 31, 1841.

At a meeting held this day, the following letter and resolutions were reported by the committee, and unanimously adopted.

BOSTON, January 30, 1841.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

At a Proprietors' meeting of the Congregational Church, Purchase street, held at the church, 24th inst., the undersigned were appointed a committee to answer your communication of the 1st inst., wherein you request to be discharged from the duties of your office after the expiration of the present quarter, and to prepare some suitable resolutions referring thereto.

The committee doubtless in common with all those accustomed to listen to your counsels, regret extremely that the connection between pastor and people, could not be continued with mutual pleasure and advantage.

And now after so many years of faithful labor on your part, and when your voice had become as familiar as household words, we are called upon to accept your resignation, and become as a flock without an earthly

shepherd, to pursue our course for how long a period we know not under this deprivation.

But after so long and so loved an acquaintance, the committee cannot, and the society doubtless will not consent to have the separation take place, without some expression of regard from those who have so long enjoyed, and we trust profitably your ministration, and although the pecuniary affairs of the church are not in a very prosperous condition, it may be that the humble worshipper has become rich in one sense, while the absent proprietor has in another sense become poor, and although our location is not such as to suit the taste and please the fancy of all, still the journey we have travelled together may have been one of pleasant satisfaction, to those that are not over fastidious whether they worship in this or that church.

In closing our duty we subjoin the following resolutions, and we believe they express the feelings of all those who are attached to your society, as they do most sincerely those of the committee.

Signed, JAMES B. RICHARDSON,
GEORGE G. SMITH,
JOSIAH M. JONES.

Resolved, That the thanks of this religious society, be rendered to their pastor, the Rev. George Ripley, for his long tried and faithful services, as well in the pulpit, as in his parochial walks.

Resolved, That having entire confidence in the integrity, moral worth, and religious character of our much esteemed pastor, we take this occasion at parting, to say, that we can recommend him to the Christian world as a Christian minister, every way worthy, and

every way qualified to preach the gospel; and viewing the separation between pastor and people about to take place, and the time fast approaching when that friendly and familiar voice will be no longer heard within these walls, we cannot permit the present period to pass without expressing our sincere and deep regret that circumstances make it necessary, to induce our beloved pastor to ask his discharge; and assuring him, that although time and chance may separate us, he has our best wishes in all future time, that his lot may be that of happiness and usefulness, and in whatever sphere of labor he may be called, that he may be richly and abundantly blessed.